



News and views from the School

Twice termly: Issue no 18



Welcome to Issue No. 18

Big news from The Big Apple: The New York School, to mark its 50th anniversary, has been offering introductory philosophy this term at no charge as 'A Gift of Happiness'. This has brought a record enrolment of 1340 students, spread over 24 groups. Principal Russell Bosworth, says: *'Beyond numbers, this endeavor has energized the entire student body, resulting in a wonderful outpouring of service to care for the new students. We have all been enriched by this experience and look forward to the spring term and our largest Part 2 class ever.'*

Happy Valentine's Day – I hope you have a day of love and happiness. Very best wishes

Christine Lambie, editor



Deborah Sigrist, student in Rochester NY since 2004, has been a hospice nurse for 25 years. She also facilitates bereavement support groups and trains high school students as hospice volunteers.

Daily Facing Death

Deborah Sigrist, Rochester, NY

When I go into work in the morning, there are up to 10 patients who are in some phase of dying. Everyone is waiting, watching, wondering when their loved one will die.

Family members are helping themselves to coffee, quietly entering the meditation room or looking out at the sky. I greet husbands, wives, young adults and children by

name. Most of our patients die within a few hours, days or weeks of arrival.

Making Peace with Advancing Disease

Statistically, most people die in hospital units. Often in such settings, war is made on illness and death. But then there is a time to make peace. When diseases advance, patients arrive at our facility in crisis; often with pain, breathing difficulties, or delirium requiring intense symptom care. By managing symptoms, we try to quieten the body, so the true work of dying can be done. We address pain, physical as well as emotional, such as fear, anxiety, anger, and depression. Social and spiritual pain is also a potential cause of suffering that can block a peaceful death.

Final Journey

There are two aspects of the journey the dying person takes. One is visible on the outside, the physical aspects; the other journey is inner. We do not know what aspects of the ego need to be reckoned with before release. This is part of the labor of dying and it needs to be given its due time and rhythm to complete. Witnessing this process, I am daily reminded that we are not in charge. We are simply companions on the journey.

As death nears, communication is often obscure and symbolic. The most common near-death awareness I witness is the dying person staring at someone or something in the room that no one else sees. Often this is a religious figure, a deceased relative or bright light. One man suddenly woke up, reached outward and said, "I'm ready". In my experience, the person is comforted by these visions, not frightened. Or, a patient may suddenly talk about travel or needing to "get going". I've seen an unresponsive patient suddenly sit up and look for a map, request to go home or help pack a suitcase.

The timing of death can also be amazing to witness. Some wait to die until certain people arrive or others leave. I remember one mother who could not die until talking with her son who was in prison. Once that was understood, we contacted the facility and the chaplain brought the young man to the phone. Though barely alive, one could see the mother's face begin to relax as the phone was held to her ear. She died minutes after that call.

Tear of farewell

Many families witness "the final tear", a phenomenon where water forms in one eye of the person a few hours before or at the moment of death. It may form in the inner corner of the eye, a little stream from the outer edge or a round tear sliding down the cheek. We know that tears of pain and sadness flow from both eyes. But this legendary tear is only seen in one eye; the other is noticeably dry. The message to those of us on the outside is "All is well; I love you". I've personally witnessed this phenomenon about 90% of the time with patients. We give a lovely embroidered hankie to family members to swab the tear as a keepsake.

Miracles

People ask if we see miracles in end of life care. Perhaps one of the more underrated miracles is how family members rise to the occasion to escort their loved one to their death. This takes tremendous courage and can only be done out of love. I remember a wife who was departing our unit after her husband died. She turned and said, 'I don't understand. This has been one of the most wrenching, but beautiful times of my life.' Though a cure for the disease didn't happen, countless healings may have taken place - reconciliation, tender goodbyes, life reflection, forgiveness, and shared laughter. These too are perhaps miracles.

Hospice Care

In hospice, the patient and family together are one unit. We help families to understand what may be happening to their loved one as death draws near. A team of doctors, nurses, social workers, pastoral care and bereavement coordinators work together to provide treatment, education and support. Another facet of providing support is recruiting and educating community volunteers.

Hospice is a philosophy of care that neither hastens nor postpones death. It has a rich grass-roots history that originated in the Middle Ages. Dame Cicely Saunders, founder of the first modern hospice in 1967, said, 'If we cannot add days to your life, we hope to add life to your days'. The emphasis was on quality of life by dying at home with expert management of physical, psychosocial and spiritual pain.

My own work

The only way I could avoid depression or burnout in this work was by keeping my focus on the one indwelling Self, which I believe is untouched by disease and death. In the midst of so much change and loss, I try to help family members also find this source of connection. The knowledge and experience of Self have been the greatest gifts I have received from Philosophy School; these continue to ground and sustain me in this work. Our practices, including meditation, the pause between activities, and exposure to 'good company' serve as reminders to keep my ego in check so the radiant Self can more clearly flow through me. One death has lingered with me and I believe it illustrates the one Self which 'lives when this body dies'.

Max was an elderly homeless man, gaunt, bearded, alone, lying in bed naked, having thrown off his gown. I knew that death was moments away. Without thinking, I moved to the foot of the bed and placed my hands a few inches above his feet. Our eyes locked as I said, 'Go home'. With that he took a deep exhalation. I repeated the phrase as my hands gently moved up his body. Each time he exhaled in response. His eyes were bright though his skin was rapidly losing color. We were connected by something bigger than both of us. When I reached the crown of his head I once again urged him to 'Go home'. With that he exhaled deeply, closed his eyes and died. I knew something took flight at that moment. My breath was taken away also, by the wonder of this experience.

Serving the terminally ill is privileged work. It is entering the world of those marked by a multitude of losses and suffering. From these patients and families, I've learned about wisdom, courage, and gratitude. I'm offered countless opportunities to stay in the moment and to practise kindness. At the end of the day, I'm reminded of my shared humanity through the one Self.

Deborah's booklet, a guide to nearing death, 'Lighting the Path through the Final Days of Life' is available at [vns](#).



Top Tips

Items recommended by readers

TED mindfulness in schools. Richard Burnett who was recently a speaker at Just This day in London, introduces his attention and mindfulness work in schools. Go to [TEDBurnett](#).

Bhagavad Gita online. This book with the commentary of Shri Shankaracharya is available to read online or download. Go to [BhGita](#).

3. Social networking. Have a look at the links at the bottom of the newsletter to follow our pages.

In 2000, in the midst of considerable turmoil in the Dutch School, Rob Kruijk was appointed as the new leader. Here he tells something of the current situation in the School. In the photo, he stands in



*front of the School's residential building,
the Oxerhof.*

The School in Holland Rob Kruijk, Amsterdam

School, wherever, whenever, is work in progress. The School in Holland, now 50 years old, is no different. What, then, is the most salient point? Perhaps resilience, connected to truth.

Resurgence

The manifestations of that truth in our School have seen many twists and turns, with the biggest around the turn of the century. Leadership issues and a small but powerful group breaking away almost threw the School out of existence. But the resilience from meditation and group meetings rose above organisational conflict.

In 2001 we took the ultimate step of moving out of the organization as it was. We left all the buildings and set up a new legal structure with 90% of the students and rented buildings, all in about 4 week's time. Luckily, our residential centre, the Oxerhof, was in a separate legal structure led by people in the main body, so we have retained that.

So, here we are, some 15 years later. The resilient foundation of our heritage allowed us to keep, partly renew and further develop the School with its 8 branches nicely spread across Holland. There is a strong core of 200 senior students and a highly fluctuating body of 400+ students in the earlier parts. We are fortunate now to have a Dutch-speaking meditation initiator, so students in Holland can be introduced to meditation through their own language. This also provides great support and inspiration for meditation.

Buildings

City School buildings we rent, but we own our beloved residential centre the Oxerhof, which has grown to become the spiritual centre of the School.

Most unfortunately, in WW II, the Oxerhof was used by the German occupiers as a very small concentration camp, and some executions took place there. To lay these ghosts to rest, a large bronze statue was commissioned for the grounds. Here each year on May 4th a memorial service takes place, attended by a group of around 100 people including descendants of the people killed almost 70 years ago. For some 23 years, residential have taken place at this property. In the last 5 years, major upgrading has been done, of rooms, kitchen facilities and a wonderful new extension of a big meeting room on the ground floor looking generously out into the woods.

Near to the Oxerhof, is the Deventer branch which, interestingly, rents the Latin School building for the early parts of the School. This famous Latin School is where Erasmus, Thomas á Kempis and Holland's only Pope, Adrian Boeyens, went to school – a grand place for our early part students to get introduced to philosophy.

Plato and Dialectic

In Holland we are articulate about likes and dislikes. We like to act expediently. We dislike formality and

accepting authority is something of an acquired taste for a Dutchman. Is this perhaps why Plato is so dear to us? We have had several events led by Dr. David Horan (student in Dublin). In 2014 there will be another International Week. The dialectic booklet produced in Melbourne (see Insight 7) has been translated into Dutch; its use is gradually spreading in the School with great benefit to our spiritual discourses.

Other Activities

Cultural Day: Following the inspirational example of Melbourne, we mobilised a team from all our 8 branches, planned and delivered a Cultural Day in the Netherlands at the end of May 2012. We had some 230 people on an unseasonably cold, but luckily dry day, for a feast put together by the long-standing students for the newer ones and their spouses.

Art in Action UK: Around 25 students from Holland attend at Art in Action each year and serve the event. In 2009 we hosted a very successful International Law and Economics week.

As with all schools outside the English language zone, translation is a continuous process. As well as the group material, we have translation projects on the conversations of Shri Shantananda Saraswati, Plato (some of Dr Horan's new translation for the week he is going to conduct), Ficino, and much more. This involves 20 + people on a continuous basis.

Academy

Like many Schools, besides the core activity built on the advaita philosophy, we cover a whole range of topics for study and activity. The Academy offers creative crafts and arts, drawing, painting and sculpture, calligraphy, economics, Ficino, Plato, singing (choral and Gregorian choir), palliative care, religion and some natural sciences. There is a core group of about 25 students, past and present, in Amsterdam who meet every Sunday morning. In some branches there are similar smaller groups. They have residential weekends and a week in the summer, so it is very much part of the School's full program.

Advaita for life

What is emerging is a positioning of the School as a Practical Philosophy School for the first 6+ years. Then for students who wish to stay on, the advaita (philosophy of unity) School for a lifetime. The early signs of working along these lines are promising. Thus we feel that in this way the resilience which was tested so much in the past can be sustained for generations to come.

To see the School's website go to: [DutchSchool](#).

Most of the replies from the last newsletter were about Lily, the mischievous labrador puppy, living with Donald Lambie, the leader of the School, and his wife (the editor). We gave her a chance to reply.

Letter from Lily

Thanks for all your love and photos – I feel as if I have friends all across the world now. I'm sure you'd like to know the best thing about my owners? It's probably their books. The other day, I got hold of his copy of Plotinus. I'm just hungry for knowledge. Indeed you could say I devour books. Come to think of it, no philosophy student has digested Plotinus more thoroughly than me.

I've been to Waterperry [the School's residential house] a few times. Gosh I made sooo many friends – lots of fun. But they spent so much time talking there. I tried to explain that there are only 2 important things – food and balls. That's the Way



of Zen Labrador, dualistic I know, but life is simple when it all comes down to 2 things. And very happy actually, worth wagging a tail for. So there's something to think about. Till next time,

Love from Lily



Nanotechnology

Exciting new knowledge

Dhruv Saxena, philosophy student in Canberra, is working on his PhD. In December, he had a paper published in the prestigious academic journal, 'Nature Photonics', a sister journal to 'Nature'. He has been part of the School since he was 15, first in Wagga Wagga, then Sydney, and now Canberra.

The work is about tiny lasers which could be used in future computers: to improve their speed, make them more energy efficient and make devices lighter. We fashion these tiny lasers using nanowires, which are tiny solid wire-like structures, that are smaller than the wavelength of light in diameter.

I think the practices of the School have helped me, especially in being steady, focused and detached from the outcomes.

Experimental physics can be quite frustrating, since experiments rarely turn out the way you want them to, and so patience and determination are necessary. I found the pause and other exercises helpful in keeping calm, and not being swayed by emotions, in both positive and negative circumstances. In fact I found it more difficult when experiments worked out, because the excitement made the attention more scattered, leading to a lot more mistakes. And then the anticipations and expectations get in the way too, leading to a lot more frustration. So keeping calm and detached were very important for my own sanity.

People had discovered making lasers using nanowires almost a decade ago, but we were the first to make nanowire lasers from a technologically important material (Gallium Arsenide), and show that nanowire lasers in this material can operate at room-temperature. This material is widely used in lasers which are

used for optical and data communication (i.e. internet). But making smaller lasers in this material system has been quite challenging and getting strong light emission at room-temperature has also been a struggle. We have been able to overcome these difficulties because of significant improvement in material quality, and proper design of the nanowire laser.

The photo shows an artistic impression of the nanowire lasers. To learn more, go to: [ABCNews](#)

Thanks for reading

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Please keep that feedback coming. I need all your suggestions of personal stories, insights, links, articles, cartoons, video clips – anything that will be of interest to our philosophy community. Do you know someone in the School who has an interesting story to tell? E-mail me at: editor@seslondon.org. Thanks again for reading, CL

The views expressed in this document are not necessarily those of the Fellowship of the School of Economic Science

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